

Amendments to the Claims

Please amend the Claims as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A ~~hot-filled~~ plastic container suitable for hot filling, comprising:
a bell portion, a body portion and a base;
wherein said bell portion includes a neck for passage of a hot filled product therethrough
and a shoulder portion between said neck and said body portion;
said body portion having panel sections provided with respective flat outer surfaces that are smooth and virtually flat, the panel sections joining one another along respective smooth, rounded corners and being operative to flex between an inwardly-bowed configuration and a planar configuration in response to temperature changes experienced by the container, ~~wherein the panel sections and the corners cooperate to define the entire periphery of the body portion, such that the entire periphery of the body portion has a smooth outer contour uninterrupted by ribs, stress absorbing strips, raised areas, or recessed areas; and~~
a first horizontal ridge isolating the body portion from the bell portion and a second horizontal ridge isolating the body portion from the base portion, each panel section extending from the first horizontal ridge to the second horizontal ridge, allowing the panel sections to have sufficient flexibility to move between the planar configuration and the inwardly-bowed configuration in response to temperature changes experienced by the container, so that the panel sections act as vacuum panels,
wherein the smooth outer surfaces of the panel sections and the smooth corners define a continuous outer surface of the body portion that is smooth, uninterrupted, and devoid of ribs, stress absorbing strips, raised areas, or recessed areas.
~~means for isolating the panel sections from the bell portion and the base to permit the panel sections to have sufficient flexibility to move between the bowed and planar configurations to act as vacuum panels.~~
- 2-3. (Cancelled)

4. (Original) The plastic container of claim 1 further comprising a label engaging said panel sections.
5. (Original) The plastic container of claim 4 wherein said label extends from the bottom of said neck to said base, including said panel sections.
6. (Original) The plastic container of claim 1 wherein said container is a blow-molded polypropylene container.
7. (Original) The plastic container of claim 6, wherein said container is a beverage container which contains a hot filled beverage.
8. (Original) The plastic container of claim 1 wherein said container has a top load rating of at least 80 pounds at room temperature or below.
9. (Original) The plastic container of claim 1 wherein two opposing side panels have a mold line therein.
10. (Original) A multilayer plastic container comprising at least one wall which defines an interior surface and an exterior surface of the container, wherein said wall is formed of seven layers with a first layer of polypropylene, a second layer of adhesive, a third layer of ethylene-vinyl alcohol polymer, a fourth layer of adhesive, a fifth layer of regrind, a sixth layer of adhesive, and a seventh layer of polyamide and wherein said first layer of polypropylene forms the exterior surface of the container and said seventh layer of polyamide forms the interior surface of the container.
11. (Original) The plastic container of claim 10 wherein said container is a hot fill plastic container.

12. (Original) The plastic container of claim 11 wherein said container is a blow-molded container.
13. (Previously Presented) The plastic container of claim 10 wherein said fifth layer of regrind forms about 70% or more of the thickness of said wall.
14. (Previously Presented) The plastic container of claim 13 wherein said first layer of polypropylene forms approximately 20% of the thickness of said wall.
15. (Previously Presented) The plastic container of claim 14 wherein said third and seventh layers each form approximately 2% of the thickness of said wall.
16. (Original) A multilayer plastic container formed of a polymeric material, wherein said polymeric material comprises a layer of polypropylene, a layer of ethylene-vinyl alcohol polymer adhered to said layer of polypropylene, a layer of regrind adhered to said layer of ethylene-vinyl alcohol polymer, and a layer of amorphous nylon adhered to said layer of regrind, wherein said layer of amorphous nylon forms the interior surface of the container.
17. (Original) The plastic container of claim 16 wherein said container is a hot fill plastic container.
18. (Previously Presented) The plastic container of claim 16 wherein said layer of regrind forms about 70% or more of the thickness of said polymeric material.
19. (Previously Presented) The plastic container of claim 18 wherein said layer of polypropylene forms approximately 20% of the thickness of said polymeric material.

20. (Previously Presented) The plastic container of claim 19 wherein said layer of ethylene-vinyl alcohol polymer and said layer of amorphous nylon each form approximately 2% of the thickness of said polymeric material.

21-37. (Canceled)

38. (Currently Amended) A ~~hot-filled~~ plastic container suitable for hot filling, comprising:
a bell portion;

a body portion, generally rectangular in transverse cross section and including four sidewalls joining one another along respective corners, each of said sidewalls having a virtually flat outer surface and being operative to flex between a bowed configuration and a planar configuration in response to temperature changes experienced by the container;

a first horizontal, elevated ridge disposed around the periphery of the container between the body portion and the bell portion;

a base; and

a second horizontal, elevated ridge disposed around the periphery of the container between the body portion and the base,

wherein the virtually flat outer surface of each of said sidewalls extends from the first elevated ridge to the second elevated ridge and between the respective corners adjoining the sidewall;

wherein said bell portion includes a neck for passage of a hot filled food product therethrough and a shoulder portion between said neck and said body portion; and

wherein said first elevated ridge isolates the four sidewalls in the main body portion from the bell portion and the second elevated ridge isolates the four sidewalls in the main body portion from the base, so as to allow the sidewall to have sufficient flexibility to move between the bowed and planar configurations and so to act as vacuum panels.

39. (Currently Amended) A ~~hot-filled~~ plastic container suitable for hot filling, comprising:

a bell portion having a neck for passage of a hot filled food product therethrough and a shoulder portion located below the neck, the shoulder portion having a cross-sectional area greater than a cross-sectional area of the neck;

a base portion forming a bottom of the container and extending upwardly from the bottom; and

a body portion extending between the bell portion and the base portion, the body portion having a polygonally shaped cross-section defined by a plurality of ~~flat~~ panel sections joined to one another by a plurality of smoothly rounded corners, each of said panel sections having a smooth and virtually flat outer surface and being operative to flex between an inwardly-bowed and a planar configuration in response to temperature changes experienced by the container,

~~wherein the flat panel sections and the smoothly rounded corners cooperate to define the entire periphery of the body portion, such that the entire periphery of the body portion has a smooth outer contour uninterrupted by structural features,~~

wherein when the panel sections are in the respective planar configurations, the body portion has a cross-sectional area that is substantially unchanged throughout the body portion,

wherein the cross-sectional area of the body portion is smaller than the cross-sectional area of the shoulder portion at a juncture between the body portion and the shoulder portion, to form a first horizontal ridge at the juncture between the body portion and the shoulder portion, the first horizontal ridge extending around the periphery of the container,

wherein the cross-sectional area of the body portion is smaller than a cross-sectional area of the base portion at a juncture between the body portion and the base portion, to form a second horizontal ridge at the juncture between the body portion and the base portion, the second horizontal ridge extending around the periphery of the container, and

wherein the first horizontal ridge isolates the body portion from the bell portion and the second horizontal ridge isolates the body portion from the base portion, allowing the panel sections to have sufficient flexibility to move between the planar configuration and the bowed configuration in response to temperature changes experienced by the container, so that the panel sections act as vacuum panels, and

wherein the smooth outer surfaces of the panel sections and the smoothly rounded corners define a continuous outer surface of the body portion that is smooth, uninterrupted, and devoid of structural surface features, wherein the continuous outer surface extends from the first horizontal ridge to the second horizontal ridge.

40. (Previously Presented) The plastic container of claim 39 further comprising a label engaging said panel sections.

41. (Previously Presented) The plastic container of claim 39 wherein the shoulder portion of the bell portion comprises:

an outwardly-curved upper portion adjacent the neck;
an inwardly-curved recessed area adjacent the upper portion, having a cross-sectional area smaller than a cross-sectional area of the upper portion; and
an outwardly-curved lower portion adjacent the recessed area and adjacent the first horizontal ridge, having a cross sectional area greater than the cross-sectional area of the recessed area.

42. (Previously Presented) The plastic container of claim 39 wherein said container is a blow-molded polypropylene container.

43. (Previously Presented) The plastic container of claim 42, wherein said container is a beverage container which contains a hot filled beverage.

44. (Previously Presented) The plastic container of claim 39 wherein said container has a top load rating of at least 80 pounds at room temperature or below.

45. (Previously Presented) The plastic container of claim 39 wherein two opposing side panels have a mold line therein.

46. (Previously Presented) The plastic container of claim 39 wherein said container is formed of a polymeric material, said polymeric material having a layer of polypropylene, a layer of ethylene-vinyl alcohol polymer adhered to said layer of polypropylene, a layer of regrind adhered to said layer of ethylene-vinyl alcohol polymer, and a layer of polyamide adhered to said layer of regrind, and wherein said layer of polypropylene forms an exterior surface of the container and said layer of polyamide forms an interior surface of the container.

47. (Previously Presented) The plastic container of claim 46, wherein the polyamide layer comprises amorphous nylon.

48. (Previously Presented) The plastic container of claim 46 wherein said layer of regrind forms about 70% or more of the thickness of said polymeric material.

49. (Previously Presented) The plastic container of claim 46 wherein said layer of polypropylene forms approximately 20% of the thickness of said polymeric material.

50. (Previously Presented) The plastic container of claim 46 wherein said layer of ethylene-vinyl alcohol polymer and said layer of polyamide each form approximately 2% of the thickness of said polymeric material.

51. (Previously Presented) The plastic container of claim 1, wherein said container is formed of a polymeric material, said polymeric material having a layer of polypropylene, a layer of ethylene-vinyl alcohol polymer adhered to said layer of polypropylene, a layer of regrind adhered to said layer of ethylene-vinyl alcohol polymer, and a layer of polyamide adhered to said layer of regrind, and wherein said layer of polypropylene forms an exterior surface of the container and said layer of polyamide forms an interior surface of the container.

52. (Previously Presented) The plastic container of claim 1, wherein when the panel sections are in the respective planar configurations, the body portion has a cross-sectional area that is substantially unchanged throughout the body portion.